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III

COVERING REPORT

The Political Attitude of the German Catholic Bishops

The fact that the Nazis, in spite of the Concordate with the Holy See, established in July 1933, did not hesitate to extend their totalitarian policy to the religious field and started a more or less open persecution of the Catholic Church in the Third Reich, and also the fact that the German bishops vigorously protested the measures taken by the Nazi government in this behalf, have provoked in the outside world the impression that the German episcopate forms a united body of resistance and that, therefore, it will be easy to rely on the bishops and the Church administration in the AMG period following the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. This impression is false. The German episcopate is composed of individuals who have no common political point of view as far as the future of Germany is concerned. The Catholic resistance against the Nazi regime has always been, at least as far as the bishops are concerned, a purely religious opposition and not a political one.

During the First World War the German episcopate adopted a very "patriotic" attitude and put ^{its} ~~his~~ moral authority behind the efforts of the Imperial government to bolster

SECRET

-2-

home moral. After the break-down of the German monarchies and the establishment of the Weimar Republic most of the bishops had the feeling that the victorious leftist parties would now initiate a violent anti-clerical policy and start a persecution of the Church. They counted on the repetition of the experiences made in France after the Great Revolution and in Russia after the arrival of the Bolsheviks into power. They were agreeably surprised by the fact that the German Socialists, locked in a deadly struggle with the Communists, sought the collaboration of the Catholic Center Party. During the entire period from 1919 to 1933 the election returns favored the Center Party in putting it constantly in a position that there was no parliamentary majority without the collaboration of the Center Party which formed alternatively governments with the left and the right parties and always exercised such an influence that never before had the Catholic Church enjoyed a freedom of action comparable to that in the time of the Weimar Republic.

In the first years after the war the majority of the German bishops adopted a very cautious attitude. They concentrated their efforts on the special field of cultural politics, primarily school policy, and encouraged the faithful to vote for the Center Party in order to make the parliamentary representation of the Catholic point of view in public affairs as strong as possible.

SECRET

-3-

An exception was formed by some of the Bavarian bishops, who under the leadership of Cardinal Faulhaber, opposed the Weimar Republic and the centralistic Berlin government. Those bishops were Bavarian monarchists and dreamed of the possibility of restoring the Royal Bavarian family in their old rights and disengaging the Bavarian state, the so-called "Ordnungszelle", from the influence of the newly created democracy and the policies adopted by the Social Democrat Party. Because the Center Party, under the leadership of Matthias Erzberger (assassinated by German nationalists in 1921), had placed itself openly on the basis of republicanism and parliamentary democracy and pledged close collaboration to the two other democratic parties, (the Social Democrats and the Democrats), the Bavarian Catholics split from the Center Party as early as 1919 and created the Bavarian Populist Party, an outspoken conservative party. Bavarian federalism angered by the centralistic policy of the Reich's government and the special economic structure of Bavaria, which is an agrarian country, favored this separation which had the most unfortunate consequences, for instance, the election of Hindenburg as president of the Reich in 1925 against the candidate of the Center Party Wilhelm Marx. The small majority of Hindenburg was only due to the fact that the Bavarian Populists voted for him and not for the Catholic Marx. This fact was only a symbol for the constant hostility of the Bavarian Catholics against the Weimar Republic. Cardinal Faulhaber was the man who

SECRET

-4-

encouraged this hostility with all the means at his disposal. In the first years of the Weimar Republic Bavaria became, thus, the refuge for all the nationalistic and militaristic elements of Northern Germany, General Ludendorff, for instance. In a strange coalition of Bavarian Federalists and Catholics with Prussian Militarists and Nationalists Hitler had been allowed to make his first steps.

The bishops in the Western and Northern regions of Germany and the bishops of the industrialized districts of the Rhineland and Westphalia, were closer to the minds of the Catholic people following the political leadership of the Center Party. Those bishops were almost friends to the new democratic way of life. But only a few of them (Bishop Sproll of Rottenburg and Bishop Kaller of Ermland) agreed wholeheartedly with the political development under the Weimar Republic. There was no doubt that most of the bishops were delighted when the Center Party formed a coalition with the parties to its right and had no objections when Hindenburg became President of the Reich. They still feared the anti-clericalism of the left and were not sure that the Catholic electorate would resist the temptation of the Social Democrat ideology if the collaboration between the Center Party and the Social Democrat party should become more than an expediency. In 1926 when the German left initiated a public referendum for expropriation

SECRET

-5-

of the funds of the former monarchs, accused of conspiring against the security of the republican state, the bishops openly opposed this referendum and declared that no faithful Catholic could be allowed to vote for a law expropriating private property from its owners. The growing strength of the Nazi party found the bishops mildly alarmed. They were aware of the difficulties which must arise for the Church should a totalitarian party seize the power. They realized that the Catholic Church in Germany, being the Church of a minority, would ⁱⁿ ~~be~~ incur even greater interference from a Nazi regime than the Catholic Church in Italy had to endure under Fascist rule. The violent propaganda of the Nazis in which anti-clericalism had its full share provoked counter-measures by the bishops. Religious funerals for members of the Nazi party were forbidden and in several Pastoral Letters the Joint Conference of the German Bishops warned the faithful of the Nazis. Reassured partly by the fact that Mussolini concluded the Lateran Agreement with the Church, the German bishops counted on the influence of the "moderates", i.e., the German Nationalist Party, the Army and the Reich's President von Hindenburg and his environment, when Hitler really came into power. Papen and other reactionary Catholics succeeded in convincing the bishops that the fury of the Nazis against the "blacks" was aimed only at the Center Party collaborating with the Socialists and

SECRET

-6-

the "Political Catholicism" opposed to German nationalism. Hitler's offer of the Reich's Concordate did the rest. The bishops were not convinced that the Nazis could be dealt with as the Social Democrats after the so-called revolution of 1918 to 1919. They dropped all the moral aid they had given to the Center Party as political representation of the Catholic electorate. They also sacrificed those Catholic associations which had anti-nationalistic and anti-militaristic aims and they did not oppose the dissolution of the Christian Trade Unions and their merger into the so-called German Labor Front. They closed their eyes to the fact that many Catholic political leaders, and even priests, were put into concentration camps, tortured or driven into exile. They were sure that the National Socialism would drop soon its "Kinderkrankheiten" (childhood diseases) and become reasonable. The Concordate reassured them completely and they adopted a very friendly attitude toward the Hitler government. They were cruelly disappointed. The Nazi regime became more and more totalitarian and violent and the old figures of German Nationalism disappeared one after the other from the political scene. The "guarantees" against abuse of Nazi power were abolished and step by step the Nazis started the attack on the Church herself. There was soon not a single article of the Concordate which was not violated by the Nazi regulations of the political and cultural life

SECRET

-7-

in the Third Reich. All the Catholic associations, even the merely religious ones, were dissolved, the Catholic press disappeared completely and finally the attack on the Catholic schools and ecclesiastical institutions, as the convents and the orders, went on its way. The "trials of defame" initiated against members of the regular and the secular clergy because of alleged violations of the laws regulating the exchange of foreign currency or because of alleged immoral conduct bore their fruits. Every day it became clearer that the Nazis had decided to alienate the German Youth completely from the Christian faith. One of the bishops, Bishop Legge of Meissen, was indicted himself and acts of violence against others, Cardinal Faulhaber, Bishop Ehrenfried of Wuerzburg, and Bishop Sproll of Rottenburg followed. The latter has been driven out of his diocese.

At the first signs of the open persecution the bishops tried to influence the regime in showing the whole extent of their patriotism. Thus the Catholics of the Sarre territory were told by their bishops, Bishop Bornewasser of Treves and Bishop Sebastian of Speyer, that they should vote for the reattachment to German in the plebiscite of January 1935, in order to avoid to their correligionairs the blame that being a Catholic meant being anti-national. Even in the time when the Nazi persecution reached its peak and the relations between the Third Reich and the Holy

SECRET

-8-

See grew worse and worse the bishops clung to the theory that Catholic resistance was exercised only on the religious field and meant no interference into political or state affairs. Up to today the bishops protested only the anti-Church measures of the Nazi regime and the cultural policy of the Third Reich and made only indirect allusions to the injustice of the regime as a whole and its constant violations of justice and humanity in all other fields of public life.

On the other hand, there are quite obvious differences in the attitude adopted by the single bishops. Some of them, Cardinal Paulhaber, the bishop of Muenster in Westphalia, Count von Galen, the bishop of Berlin, Count von Preysing, Bishop Dietz of Fulda, Bishop Sproll of Rottenburg and even, after initial hesitation, Bishop Bornewasser of Treves and Archbishop Groeber of Freiburg im Breisgau protested more vigorously than the other bishops and were much more courageous, as for instance, Bishop Kaller of Ermland who was once the hope of the Liberal Catholics of Germany or the Bishops of Limburg, Hildesheim Augsburg, Eichstaett and the Prelate Hartz of Schneidemuehl. One bishop is an open friend of the Nazi regime, Bishop Berning of Osnabrueck, and among the other Bishop Stohr of Mentz clings still to the hope of a final settlement of the difficulties and a compromise with the Nazi regime.

SECRET

-9-

When war began some of the bishops hoped that the regime would now ^{moderate} lenify its cultural policy in order to assure itself of the loyalty of Catholic soldiers. There were disappointed again. The Nazis knew how to profit from war time regulations in order to reenforce the anti-Catholic policy and to deprive the Church of some more of their small possibilities of influencing the public opinion. More convents were closed down, more institutions of Catholic charity taken over by the state, the last remaining Catholic magazines disappeared.

The attitude of the bishops is nevertheless very ambiguous. Some of them, as Cardinal Bertram of Breslau and Bishop Buchberger of Regensburg who were generally on the resistance line adopted even the official Nazi propaganda depicting the Russian War as a crusade in the interest of Western Culture. They published statements praising the German soldiers as defenders of Christianity against Bolshevism. But it must be noted that other bishops remained completely silent when the Nazis urged their moral support for the war against Soviet Russia.

There is no doubt, with very few exceptions, that the ^{hearts of the} bishops are not ~~with their hearts~~ in this war and they realize very well that the Catholic Church has much to gain and nothing to lose by the destruction of Nazi tyranny. On the other hand, most of the bishops are genuine German

SECRET

-10-

"patriots", many of them even inclined to nationalism. They, therefore, encouraged the Catholics drafted in the German Army to be good soldiers, but they put the accent more on a good Christian conduct of soldiers' life than on the merely military virtues. And they blamed the Nazis for disrupting national unity and hampering the wholehearted support of the Catholic population by their anti-Catholic policies. The most striking fact was the Pastoral Letter of the Joint Conference of the German Bishops pretending that the people of Alsace-Lorraine had welcomed the return to Germany and were only disappointed by the hostility shown by the Nazis to their Catholic faith.

meaningless.

It may, therefore, be assumed that the German bishops will be glad to get rid of the Nazis but on the other hand will try to encourage all the tendencies which work in favor of a mild peace for their country. They will be, apart from a few exceptions, cooperative if AMG arrives, but protest vigorously all measures of coercion taken against others as the leading Nazi criminals. Obviously they fear the Russians and will therefore, be united behind those who are for the "Western orientation" of post-Hitler Germany. They will, perhaps, welcome a renewal of German democracy itself and they may have learned enough from their experiences in the past ten years as to regret certain errors of the past.

SECRET

-11-

But it would ^{be} mean too much to ~~expect from them~~ to assume that they will be enthusiastic about the cause of the United Nations. There may be some bishops more comprehensive and more politically minded than the majority. As a body they will cling to the attitude of assuming only religious authority and be active only in relief work. They will be still very suspicious as far as cultural aims of democracy are concerned. Much will depend from the development of the Holy See's policies after this war. It must be added that most of the German bishops are very old men. They did not even understand what Nazi totalitarianism meant and they will have great difficulties in understanding a new world. But, on the other hand, there was already before Hitler's arrival into power a very strong liberal Catholic movement in Germany and numerous priests, mainly in the industrial regions of West and Southwestern Germany, were its adherents. The common struggle against Nazi oppression had brought close together the former members of the Christian and the Free Trade Unions, there is no more antagonism between those who work in the anti-Nazi underground movement. The bishops may try to apply the brake to a Catholic movement embracing too much of the ideologies of the left but they will certainly yield to a real public pressure under the condition that a future democracy will be free of anti-clericalism.

SECRET

-12-

Nazi totalitarianism and Nazi persecution of the Church has brought the bishops, against their will, in the first line of defense. For future politics they will be glad to see Catholic laymen assume political leadership and represent Catholic interests in public affairs. That does not mean that the ecclesiastical authorities will renounce any political influence, but they will be again behind the scene^s as in the time of Imperial and Republican Germany.